



# Training for teachers of nursing

## A contribution towards an assessment of training practices



**Maria de Lourdes Magalhães Oliveira**

*Assistant Professor of Higher Polytechnic Education at the Artur Ravara Higher School of Nursing*

### Introduction

Nursing has historically been subject to the influences - scientific, technical, cultural and in human values - that are bound up with the changes in our evolving society. In Portugal, nursing is currently undergoing further changes with the inclusion of courses in nursing in higher education.

A few decades ago, technical and scientific training for the nursing profession went hand-in-hand with a sound humanistic education based on a system of ethical/moral values. Nowadays, the complexity of modern life, which is becoming increasingly compartmentalised and materialistic with a greater emphasis placed on technical than on human considerations, is leading to a loss of values and respect for the individual as a person.

School, as a social subsystem, reflects the problems of society but can be a place where practices help palliate the imbalances, indifference and lack of human respect. In fact, we found considerable advances at the cognitive and technological level, although there is still much to be done at the level of humanistic education.

The problems of nursing training today offer a vast field for study. A teacher of nursing cannot, as we see it, become isolated and allow himself to be overtaken by change 'running the risk of becoming out of date and forfeiting professional efficiency because of a lack of the training, time and culture the school should provide' (Hargreaves, 1998).

Time is an obvious and predominant requirement. Time drives a person towards dynamic, innovative openness (Bruner, 2000). The extra time granted to teachers so that they can devote themselves to other activities such as training may be taken from them

again through tighter controls and regulations concerning how this time should be used (Hargreaves, 1998).

Our study, therefore, seeks to explore and analyse the training of teachers of nursing from the point of view of changes in training practices. We shall try to find the answers to the following questions:

- ❑ do teachers of nursing have difficulty accessing training?
- ❑ what is the relationship between the time required for school activities and the time for training, and what is the influence of timetables and their degree of flexibility?
- ❑ what leads teachers of nursing to accord priority to training and what is the personal and professional motivation behind it?
- ❑ what are the policies with regard to teacher training followed by the management of higher schools of nursing?
- ❑ how can a conventional school develop into a qualifying school?

In planning our study we set ourselves the following objectives:

- ❑ to assess the importance attributed to training by teachers of nursing;
- ❑ to assess the impact of factors motivating and impeding participation in training for teachers of nursing;
- ❑ to identify the type of practical change in the teaching of nursing that leads to training;
- ❑ to analyse the way in which teachers of nursing incorporate change in their teaching practices and its relationship to training;

**We present an exploratory study that seeks to assess training practices and to link the training of teachers of nursing to changes in these practices. This is relevant because of the need to discover how training leads to changes in teaching practice.**

**The objectives of the present study were to rate the importance attributed to training by teachers, to identify those factors that motivate or impede participation in training, to identify the type of change brought about by training and to identify obstacles to achieving the characteristics of a qualifying school.**

**The study was carried out in seven higher schools of nursing in Portugal, involving 64 teachers. A questionnaire was used to gather data. The results show that teachers attribute great importance to training but face substantial constraints: lack of time; other tasks that have to be performed; timetable rigidity; and a lack of encouragement on the part of the school. The chief obstacle to achieving the characteristics of a qualifying school is the lack of openness to change on the part of the nursing schools.**



□ to identify the obstacles to achieving the characteristics of a qualifying school.

The study is divided into three sections: the theoretical framework in which we set the questions dealt with in the study in context by means of bibliographical research; a description of the methodological framework and strategies employed; and reports on and analyses of the results obtained.

### **From historical context to present-day reality**

The first schools of nursing in Portugal date back to the closing years of the 19th century and were established in the country's principal cities - Lisbon, Coimbra and Oporto - at the initiative of doctors and administrators of the hospitals to which they belonged. There are now some 31 schools of nursing scattered throughout the country and operating outside the hospitals. They are run by teachers of nursing under the control of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education.

Training for nurses is now the responsibility of the higher schools of nursing which work in collaboration with teachers in other areas such as the social sciences and education. It has proved possible to realise the wish expressed by Florence Nightingale many years ago, that schools of nursing should be run by nurses and not by doctors.

Training for teachers of nursing is a field that is becoming increasingly geared to the acquisition of the knowledge, skills and attitudes essential to practical nursing. It cannot be divorced from the socio-cultural and political context, nor even from the requirements of the school and its curriculum. It cannot, either, disregard the knowledge and practice accumulated over the years, nor the knowledge made available by academic research (Rodrigues, 1999).

The origins of nursing training in Portugal go back to 1947. The relevant legislation states that 'The teaching of nursing should be provided in general and specialised courses of a minimum duration of two years and of one year in the case of the nursing auxiliary course'.

Training was to be directed to preparing health-care professionals in the nurse or nursing auxiliary category as well as chief nurses and supervisors. Initially the courses

were given by teaching nurses and doctors and training was essentially concerned with practical know-how.

As new requirements arose in the health sector, the need for training increased. In 1952, therefore, the length of the general nursing course was extended to three years and that for nursing auxiliaries to 18 months. Practical know-how now yielded to theoretical knowledge, 'knowing how to be' and 'knowing how to be with'.

In 1970 nursing instruction, which was under the control of the Ministry of Health, was restructured and rendered more independent and the relationship between school and the health or community organisations was strengthened. Following the revolution of 25 April 1974, the nursing auxiliary course was done away with while the general nursing course was retained with a new curriculum and new requirements:

- the course was to be given by teams composed of teachers of nursing and other technical staff;
- theory and practice were to be closely integrated with a ratio of one-third to two-thirds respectively;
- schools were to use practical training facilities ensuring the close integration of nurses' knowledge of the training locations.

In 1988 nursing was included as a subject of higher polytechnic education, a genuine shift in the training paradigm. Two years later saw the introduction of formally regulated three-year polytechnic nursing courses leading to a bacharelato qualification. It was stressed that clinical instruction should be entrusted to teachers of nursing working in collaboration with qualified nurses in the hospitals and clinics to ensure adequate coordination between the theoretical and clinical teaching components.

In 1999 came the creation of a four-year course leading to a licenciatura (first degree) in nursing to be provided by the higher schools of nursing as well as three-semester post-graduate specialisation courses not leading to an academic qualification. In the same year there was also the introduction of complementary training year for students taking the bacharelato course and planning to proceed immediately to the first degree



course. All training at this level was given by the higher nursing schools under the control of the Ministry of Health. Advanced training and studies leading to a master's degree or doctorate are the responsibility of the universities.

Whatever its type, structure or management, school always has a decisive influence, not only on students' development and learning but also on the training of teachers (Alarcão, 1996). As teachers, human beings and members of society, we are fully conscious of the challenges and the responsibility we have as providers of knowledge always to keep pace with change and to take account of developments in the sociopolitical and educational fields. Thinking out educational paths is imperative for teachers of nursing (Crespo, 1993).

This process of change is marked increasingly by the need to link school with the community as a whole and with other contexts and organisations that collaborate actively in training students of nursing. Progress is being made in opening up to other teaching institutions and countries of Europe, as called for by the Bologna process.

The changes taking place in education, science, culture, technology and politics make it necessary for contemporary society to realise that education does not merely involve learning facts or passing exams, but forming free, responsible, competent people and citizens who in their turn will become agents of change in a pluralist society.

### **Nursing instruction and personal identity**

Learning is a way of altering one's relationship with one's environment. The extent of this change is largely determined by the need for the teacher to confront critical situations and the novelty that will help him successfully cope with the new problems and challenges of education. Higher polytechnic education aims to deliver sound higher-level cultural and technical training and a capacity for innovation and critical analysis (Pires, 1987).

Once the training of nurses was made a subject of higher polytechnic education it was found that the shift of paradigm in nursing training and in the training of teachers of nursing was still less than desired.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, teachers of nursing need to be constantly ready to accept change and up-to-date subject knowledge, and to enhance their competence in new areas of technology, such as ICT, and teaching methods. Training is playing an increasingly important role in individual development, both in initial training and in the context of lifelong learning.

As persons responsible for training other nursing teachers and instructors, we feel a growing responsibility for the paradigm shift and for the steadily increasing investment in reflective learning. Teachers may find professional enrichment through greater mastery and control of knowledge that enables them to develop their training activity in frameworks of competence.

According to Estrela (1990), a teacher's competence is not confined to know-how but must include knowledge and attitudes. It is important for teachers not just to possess skills or competence but for them to be intellectual subjects, capable of choosing and deciding on the skills most appropriate in each situation (García, 1999). From this point of view teaching is not merely a skill but a revelation of oneself to others. A teacher is a person who needs to conduct a coherent discourse and to combine the language of criticism with the possibility of giving shape and voice to students' experiences in a critical dialogue, recognising himself as an agent of change (Girou, 1988, quoted by Fernandes, 2000).

Nowadays a teacher should learn rapidly to consider these aspects, to analyse them, talk about them and ask for help in more complex situations (Perrenoud, 2002). A teacher is a person and a professional in the process of development and not entirely complete. His construction is never complete, being governed by his capacity for development and the evolving environment to which he is exposed in the course of training and work, as well as his level of cognitive knowledge; the higher this knowledge, the greater will be his capacity to take action at more complex levels (Simões, 2001).

Nursing training is an extremely wide field for research and involvement. Everyone is an agent in training and in creating the driving forces inherent in this process. As Simões (1979, 27) says, scientific research 'seeks to create in us an interest and openness to



innovation and to develop a spirit of enquiry both at the level of initial training and throughout our lives'.

Living in a century of great challenges requires that we act and do not remain idle but reflect and meditate, in order to act again in accordance with the evolutionary process, managing and driving our own change.

## Methodological framework

### Study type

We present here an exploratory study that is transversal, descriptive and comprehensive. The study involved gathering and interpreting information from 64 teachers of nursing at higher schools of nursing. We shall, therefore, be analysing the opinions of a largely homogeneous group of teachers of nursing, all with the professional status of assistant teacher.

### Area for analysis

We chose seven higher schools of nursing out of the 25 officially recognised, state-run nursing schools that exist in Portugal (including the autonomous regions of the Azores and Madeira) and constitute our working environment. We adopted the following criteria:

- ☐ the schools should all be official state schools;
- ☐ they should have a substantial number of teaching staff;
- ☐ they should be situated in areas allowing easy access to training.

This led us to eliminate the school in the Lisbon area to which we ourselves belong. Of the three state-run schools in this area we chose one. The other five chosen were located in the three principal towns and in the autonomous regions of the Azores and Madeira.

### Data gathering

Since the population with which we were concerned were all in the same professional category, we only needed one means for gathering data from the 64 persons taking part in the study.

Our aim was to obtain a maximum amount of information in as short a time as possible. On processing and analysing the data we decided that we ought to consider other aspects and to do so used a structured interview. The interview data is now being processed. The questionnaire was drawn up in three parts with 24 questions in all.

Part I contains statements making it possible to determine certain personal features of the respondents (questions 1 and 2), followed by others concerning length of teaching experience, academic training, degrees held and training courses attended (3,4,5,6).

Part II comprises 11 statements used to assess the teachers' opinions as to the factors motivating or restricting participation in training, the situation as regards training at their school, whether they were considering acquiring the training needed to improve their work, how training was given, whether they considered themselves lacking in training and if so why, any published works, the characteristics of a qualifying school, their satisfaction with their place of work, whether they considered their work would improve if they were afforded other training opportunities, fields in which they would like to improve their skills, and the need for training with groups in the same area and from other areas.

Part III contains two statements used for assessing significant experience acquired during the person's working career and what they would change at their place of work if they had the power to do so.

The questionnaire was initially validated in order to ensure that the questions were clearly understandable. It was given to four people with the same characteristics as the subjects of the study and it was decided that no rewording was required.

### Data processing

The replies to the questionnaire were processed using the method of qualitative analysis which Vala (1986) considers particularly useful at the preliminary enquiry stage. It takes account of three aspects: context, register and number. Context is the broadest segment of content a researcher examines when determining register. Register is the segment of content that is deter-



mined by placing it in a given context. Number is used as a means of quantification.

### Data presentation and analysis

Analysis of the questionnaire responses enabled us to learn the opinion of the teachers concerning the priority of, and restraints on, training, motivating and impeding factors, the characteristics of a qualifying school, obstacles to their realisation and suggestions as to change.

We shall omit some tables and charts and only give here those that are most relevant. We shall begin the analysis of data by defining the academic degree held by the teachers.

The degree held by teachers is interlinked with training. All those concerned held a higher qualification; 54 % had benefited from advanced training. Only 10 % did not hold a master's degree.

From Table 1 we see that the wish to learn more about new subjects, to acquire new knowledge, and interest in teaching and in the specialised master's course were factors motivating respondents to acquire training.

As Table 2 shows, the teachers referred to some factors restricting the possibility of training, namely their non-availability for training due to the school, possible training not always coinciding with their professional work, and difficulty in reconciling training with work and family commitments.

Training is an activity which, though carried out in relationship with others, requires an effort on the part of the learner. The training of adults presupposes training given to a person who already has some experience of life. Man begins his training in the bosom of his family and gradually extends the process in new contexts: at school, at work, in groups, in a society in a constant process of change (Dominicé, 1989).

In-service continuing training has been of concern to teachers of nursing since it is acquired as a form of self-training (55 %). In-service training is only a small part (6 %) of all training acquired.

When we come to the characteristics of a qualifying school (Table 4, Annex 1) we see

**Table 1**  
**Opinion of teachers of nursing as to factors motivating them to acquire training**

Context	Register	Number
Need to know more	*Wish to learn about new subjects	32
	*Wish to acquire new knowledge	29
	*Personal interest	29
	*Career advancement	29
	*Further the school's interests	19
	*Students' needs	18
	*Need to take on new projects	16
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>		<b>172</b>
Reasons for pursuing training	*Interest in teaching	30
	*Wish to learn new teaching methods	19
	*Interest in research	18
	*Attractive subjects	17
	*Easy access to training	17
	*Need to take on new projects	15
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>		<b>116</b>
Satisfaction with training	*Contact with colleagues in training	19
	*Contact with other teachers	18
	*Students' good results	18
	*Monitoring students' clinical training	18
	*Success achieved in work	13
	*Recognition of work by the school	7
	*Self-confidence in the classroom	4
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>		<b>97</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>385</b>

the emphasis of teachers' replies for the seven schools studied, referred to as A, B, C, D, E, F and G. In schools A, B and C reference was more to enhancing initial and continuing/further training. In the case of school B there is also an emphasis on encouraging cooperation in vocational training with other institutions and facilitating access to training by encouraging mobility of teachers and students.

The principal aspects that teachers consider lacking in their own school for it to comply with the requirements for a qualifying school are openness to change, creation of a plan for training, exchanges with other European countries, involvement in European programmes, freedom of movement, a reduced teaching workload and a more flexible timetable, involvement in new projects, more encouragement to acquire training, financial assistance with training and a clearly defined school policy.



**Table 2**

<b>Opinions as to factors impeding training</b>		
<b>Context</b>	<b>Register</b>	<b>Number</b>
Unavailable for training due to school	*Inflexible timetables	30
	*Large classes	22
	*Difficulty obtaining leave	19
	*Incompatibility with timetable	17
	*No time for doctoral work due to heavy teaching load	16
	*Too many duties to perform	15
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>		<b>119</b>
Unavailable for organisational reasons	*Distance from training location	19
	*Impossible to do project work	15
	*Lack of training criteria	13
	*Non-existence of training plan	12
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>		<b>59</b>
Impossible to reconcile with professional and family life	*Intellectually unable due to workload	20
	*No encouragement from employers	19
	*No energy left after work and family	17
	*Postponed to give time to students	12
	*Time needed to supervise students' clinical training	12
	*Too tired for extra course	10
	*Difficult to reconcile with work and family	6
	*Colleagues' negative comments on training	6
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>		<b>102</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>280</b>

As Fernandes (2000) points out, teachers need time during their teaching hours and outside of it to reflect on the complex changes being demanded of them. For this reason teachers cannot be subjected to excessively rigid timetables that risk confining them to their place of work. The school cannot function as an isolated entity but should open its doors to other realities.

b) Give priority to training, emphasising:

- the need for knowledge;
- the wish to learn about new subjects;
- interest in teaching;
- students' needs;
- career advancement;
- the need to undertake new training projects.

There is a growing realisation of the need to include knowledge, skills and attitudes in training programmes for teachers to help them understand complex teaching situations better. They will better understand their role as educators if they develop skills for this purpose. It is they who make lifelong learning a possibility and pave the way for organisational change (Fernandes, 2000).

c) We found that in some schools a 'closed' culture existed due to:

- the absence of training criteria;
- a lack of openness to change;
- a lack of incentives for training;
- the excessive burden of work placed on teachers.

d) Teachers also realise the importance of fulfilling the requirements for a qualifying school and refer to:

- openness to other teaching establishments;
- exchanges with other European countries;
- mobility of teaching staff and students;

Table 3 shows the suggestions for change made by the teachers of nursing, the chief ones being involvement in training policy decisions, better physical working conditions, a well-defined policy and the extension of training to school managers.

### Concluding remarks

The results obtained from the study lead to the following conclusions.

a) Teachers of nursing have difficulty accessing training as a result of:

- lack of time;
- rigid timetables;
- excessively large classes;
- too many tasks;
- a lack of training criteria.



- taking part in shared projects.

Change is not easy and has to be learned. Training and change need to be thought out as a group. Nowadays it is hard to justify a view of change that does not call for additional knowledge. As Escudero (1992, 41) points out 'Training should preferably be oriented to change, leading individuals to (re-)learn and renew their teaching methods so as to facilitate teaching and learning processes'.

e) The principal suggestions for change are:

- involvement in training policy decisions;
- recruiting more teachers;
- developing training projects;
- training for school managers;
- involvement in European projects;
- national and international exchanges.

This goes against the opinion of García (1999) when he says that the professional development of teachers is one aspect of the education system that is subject to political influence and pressures that are felt not only at the financial level but also at the level of incentives and autonomy.

According to Fernandes (2000, 30) 'Schools have shown difficulty in coping with change. One comes across occasional fragmented efforts and unrelated isolated projects'. Training does indeed involve experimentation, innovation, the testing of new teaching models and investment processes directly linked to educational practice (Cró, 1998). As time passes, the divide between school and the world outside becomes increasing evident (Hargreaves, 1998).

The factors impeding training referred to in replies to the questionnaire, particularly lack of time, led us to make a number of contacts with requests for assistance with the study.

Although the study has not yet been completed, a number of consequences are foreseeable. These are that school managers will grasp the implications and review their policies with regard to teacher training, display

<b>Suggestions for change</b>			<b>Table 3</b>
<b>Context</b>	<b>Register</b>	<b>Number</b>	
Involvement in training policy decisions	*Recruitment of more teaching staff	13	
	*Exchanges of teachers and students between similar schools	11	
	*Improvement of physical working conditions	11	
	*Reviewing teacher profile	9	
	*Setting up a research unit	9	
	*Creation of a reflective, dynamic plan for teacher training	8	
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>		<b>61</b>	
Creation of better working conditions	*More flexible timetables	27	
	*Facilitate access to training	21	
	*Clear, pertinent definition of training criteria	19	
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>		<b>67</b>	
Clearly defined school policy	*Create new departments and get them working	12	
	*EU-wide mobility for teachers and students	11	
	*Create working groups	10	
	*Encourage teachers to undergo training	9	
	*Update teaching staff structure	9	
	*Allocate teaching duties equitably	9	
	*Credible assessment of teachers and students	7	
	*Change mode of operation of scientific committee	4	
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>		<b>71</b>	
Training for school managers	*Make everyone responsible for his work and activities	21	
	*Devise strategies for decision-making	17	
	*Determine priority areas and projects	16	
	*Appoint as managers those best equipped for job	15	
	*Encourage reflective discussion	13	
	*Organise competitions for assistant teachers	10	
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>		<b>92</b>	
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>291</b>	

a greater openness to change without fear of forfeiting the philosophy that guides the school's operations, and permit involvement in European projects and the creation of national and international knowledge-sharing networks.



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### Key words

Nursing training,  
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qualifying school





## Legislation

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## ANNEX I - Characteristics of a qualifying school

**Table 4**

### Teachers' opinions as to the characteristics of a qualifying school

School	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
<b>Characteristics</b>							
1. More thorough initial and further training	6	7	9	1	3	3	1
2. Develop exchanges of information	1	5	1	1	1	1	3
3. Encourage cooperation in training with other schools	1	11	3	2	2	3	3
4. Facilitate adjustment to change through training	3	5	4	2	1	3	-
5. Facilitate access to training by encouraging teacher and student mobility	3	6	4	4	-	2	3